SUWON 2017: TAKE STOCK OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION COMMITMENTS (ALE) AND MAKE PROJECTIONS BEFORE CONFINTEA VII

The city of Suwon (Republic of Korea) hosted the Mid-term review of the 6th International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) from 25 to 27 October 2017. The theme of the conference was «The Power of Adult Learning: A Vision for 2030». About 500 people from at least 103 countries gathered around and focused on strategies for supporting learners and maximizing the benefits of education for youth and adults all over the world. The focus of the discussions was the 3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III, see page 2), published in 2016 by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). This report evaluates the progress made in the different member countries following the Belém Framework for Action adopted in 2009 in Brazil (see page 3). The conference of the Mid-term review CONFINTEA VI was very intensive and spread over three hard days.

After the opening ceremony with South Korean cultural displays, the meeting was opened with a presentation of the Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III). The global report is actually the summary of the regional reports, which were also presented during the meeting; the Regional Report for Sub-Saharan Africa was written by John Aitchison of South Africa.

The outlook for the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG4-Education, was the focus of the second day of the conference. The discussions focused on the intersectoral dimensions of the ALE and the implementation of the Belém Framework. The five (5) intersectoral dimensions of the ALE analyzed concern:

1/ ALE and basic skills;
2/ ALE and vocational skills;
3/ ALE and active citizenship skills;
4/ ALE for health, well-being and environmental sustainability;
5/ ALE in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The debates made it possible to assess the level of involvement of the member countries and to formulate recommendations for future actions. Strategies for implementing the Belém Framework for Action in the context of SDG4-Education 2030 were also discussed in five (5) parallel sessions with the following thematic concepts: policies, governance, financing, participation and quality.

As the mid-term review is expected to prepare
the ground for the seventh CONFINTEA-VII in 2019, the Suwon meeting has carried out a monitoring and evaluation of the ALE at the country level and at the global level in the light of SDGs 4 and 2030 Agenda. The adoption of the final declaration of the conference put an end to the meeting. Suwon 2017 has therefore been determinant and fruitful in capitalizing on the experiences gained since the adoption of the Belém Framework for Action in 2009 by the various UNESCO member countries. It also paved the way for the future with a view to achieving SGD4, in particular the ALE component. Participants recommended that countries make greater use of the RALE (Recommendations on Adult Learning and Education) which is an explicit document for all stakeholders.

GRALE III : AN OVERVIEW

The Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III) was the basic document of the mid-term review CONFINTEA VI meeting. It makes the diagnosis and mentions the progress made in the different member countries in the sector of adult learning and education (ALE). Since 2010, in the wake of the adoption of the Belém Framework for Action in December 2009, UNESCO produces triennially the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE). The different GRALE are reference materials and synthesis to inform practitioners, scientists and policy makers.

The third edition launched in 2016 examines the ALE on three major areas:
1/ Health and well-being,
2/ employment and labor market,
3/ social, civic and community life.

It contains factual data, recent and of quality, that can guide and inspire governments, civil society and researchers. It provides six (6) main aspects and executive summaries that need to be retained about the progress made in all areas of the Belém Framework for action. The GRALE III is also to remind member countries the commitments they have undertaken during the CONFINTEA VI in 2009 to support the implementation of the Belém framework for action.

Assessment of the GRALE III indicates that, despite the progress achieved, much remains to be done to position the ALE in the National development priorities, with a holistic and intersectoral approach. However, we regret that the civil society has not been enough involved in the writing of the National reports. Africa must also meet the challenge of his representative in international bodies by setting up a continental network that federates all ALE networks active on the ground for a better provision of field data.

The full version of the 3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III) is available on the link below:

BELÉM FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION: HARNESSING THE POWER AND POTENTIAL OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION FOR A VIABLE FUTURE

The CONFINTEA or International Conference on Adult Learning and Education has been organized every ten years by UNESCO since 1949. It brings together representatives of member countries, civil society, UN agencies and organizations, Non Governmental or inter-governmental organizations, foundations and other organizations active in the area of Adult Learning and Education (ALE). They discuss about the issues of ALE. In December 2009, 144 countries representatives gathered in Belém (Brazil) for the CONFINTEA VI. They agreed that ALE can transform human life, strengthen the society and promote sustainable development. «Adult Education is recognized as an essential part of the right to education and we need to set a new and urgent direction of our action giving all young and that right», did they say. So, they committed to enhance their ALE practices and policies through the Belém Framework for Action they have adopted. After a preamble setting out the philosophy behind ALE, the Belém framework of Action describes (5) strategic axes: policy, governance, financing, participation and quality.

The Mid-Term review CONFINTEA VI participants made an inventory of the progress since 2009 and considered the trends and policies that will form the future of ALE. The conference set up the strategies of implementation of the Belém Framework for Action through 5 parallel sessions of the five (5) strategic axes. Thus, proposals were made by the participants to improve the implementation of the ALE interventions in different countries and enable the right to education for all, including adults.

BEST PRACTICES

The Mid-Term Review CONFINTEA VI participants were very impressed by the commitment of Suwon and Osan mayors for long life learning. Suwon and Osan has the status of «Learning City» (concept promoted by UNESCO/UIL). They run quality education programs for all layers of the community: children, youth, adult, people of the 3rd age. Although the literacy rate is above 90% in South Korea, national and local authorities understood that they should invest in the learning and education of the illiterate people. Thus adults have the opportunity: to learn to read and write the Hangeul (Korean alphabet), to familiarize themselves with the computer, to learn to play musical instruments, etc. Libraries are available in each area and Internet is accessible to all. Preconditions for quality education are met and it affects positively the economic, social and environmental life of the population.

African cities, particularly those in West Africa, should have great interest to copy the dynamis in progress in Suwon and Osan. ALE strategies need to find more place in our local development plans and projects.
PAMOJA AO PARTICIPATION TO THE MTR-CONFINTEA VI:
AN ACTIVE PRESENCE OF THE COORDINATOR

The Coordinator of Pamoja West Africa, Mrs Carole AVANDE HOUNDJO actively represented the Network. It was a rewarding opportunity that gave increased visibility to the Sub-regional Network. She attended two important meetings: the civil society forum and the MTR-CONFINTEA VI itself. Always present and active in the discussions, she makes Africa’s voice heard in the concert of ALE actions and policies over the last 8 years worldwide. The best practices developed in the thirteen member countries of Pamoja West Africa were shared. These progress and initiatives were highly appreciated by her peers. The coordinator seized the opportunity that great meeting offered to take new contacts and get in touch with other regional or global advocacy Networks and funding partners. This was for strengthening activities and impacts of Pamoja in NFE sector in West Africa and Morocco. Regrettably, Africa was poorly represented at that important international forum which offered ideal opportunities for Networking. This is the place to appeal all the actors of NFE in Africa: «Let us be more committed and let’s get together to kick illiteracy out of Africa!».

Excerpt of the final Declaration of the civil society

A civil society forum on the topic «Education 2030» was organized by ICÆ, as a prelude to the MTR-CONFINTEA VI. The forum was sanctioned by a final declaration. Here’s an excerpt: «We recognise that the multiples crises, worsening and accelerating around the world, need attention and require an urgent response - for example, population displacements and migration, conflict and violence, educational sustainability, climate change and increasing inequalities. We affirm the crucial role of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) to address these crises». 